

CALLED IN AUTHORITY

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 103:1–14

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Mark 2:1–12

MARK 2:1–12

1 And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.

2 And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

3 And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

4 And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

6 But there were certain of the scribes sitting there, and reasoning in their hearts,

7 Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

8 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

9 Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,)

11 I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

12 And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

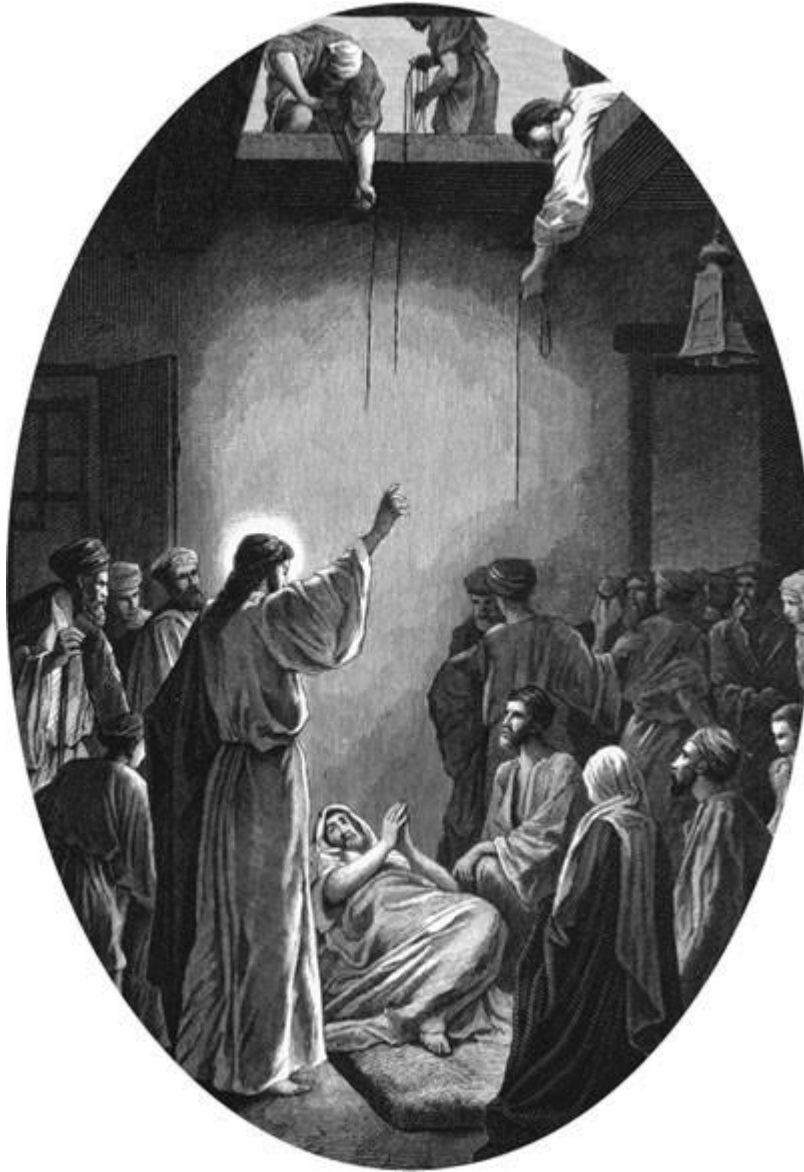


Illustration © Getty Images

KEY VERSE

Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?—[Mark 2:9](#)

CALL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Unit 2: Jesus and Calls in His Ministry LESSONS 5–8

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Summarize the account of the paralyzed man who was made whole in body and spirit.
2. Compare and contrast the differing perspectives of those present.
3. Write a prayer of thanksgiving for the assurance of Jesus' forgiveness.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. No Room in the "Farm"
- B. Lesson Context
- I. A Packed House (Mark 2:1–2)
 - A. Coming to Capernaum (v. 1)
 - B. Capacity Crowd (v. 2) *Standing Room Only?*
- II. A Paralyzed Man (Mark 2:3–5)
 - A. Extraordinary Entrance (vv. 3–4)
 - B. Surprising Statement (v. 5)
- III. Cynical Bystanders (Mark 2:6–9)
 - A. Silent Skepticism (vv. 6–7)
A Reformed Cynic
 - B. Perceptive Judgment (vv. 8–9)
- IV. An Amazing Miracle (Mark 2:10–12)
 - A. Absolute Authority (vv. 10–12a)
 - B. Glorifying God (v. 12b)

Conclusion

- A. A Different Diagnosis
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember **HOW TO SAY IT**

Capernaum Kuh-*per*-nay-um.

Corinthians Ko-*rin*-thee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

Galatians Guh-*lay*-shunz.

Galilee Gal-uh-lee.

Isaiah Eye-*zay*-uh.

Leviticus Leh-*vit*-ih-kus.

Messiah Meh-*sigh*-uh.

Nazareth *Naz*-uh-reth.

Introduction

A. No Room in the 'Farm'

In October 2018, the owners of a popular Denver restaurant announced it would be closing at the end of the year. White Fence Farm had served family-style fried chicken dinners for 45 years. The gift shop, the “barn” with live music, a children’s slide, and the petting zoo (in addition to the good food) had made White Fence Farm more than a restaurant. It was a place to create wonderful memories.

My siblings and I have a tradition of taking each other out to eat for our birthdays. As soon as I heard the news, I announced that I wanted to go to White Fence Farm since my birthday was approaching. Although the restaurant had stopped taking reservations, we were told that since we were coming on a Thursday, we should be OK as long as we got there at 5:30. Well, when we arrived, we discovered a two-and-a-half-hour wait! So we decided to go elsewhere.

The following Thursday my brother-in-law called and asked if I was game to try again. This time we got there just before the restaurant opened at 4:30. I groaned—the line leading to the door was about 50 yards long!

When we got inside, we were told the wait might be two hours. Not wanting to leave with an empty stomach again, I persuaded the others to stay. Thanks to the hostess’s cautious estimate and two sweet ladies who were happy to include us in their party, it wasn’t long before I was savoring all the chicken, sides, and fritters I could eat!

Today’s lesson considers an occasion when a crowd of people wanted to get into a house where Jesus was. The venue was so popular that one couldn’t even get near the door. For those who faithfully persisted, the reward was *much better* than a fried chicken dinner.

B. Lesson Context

The Gospel of Mark is a book of action. After an introduction of only three verses, the record begins with “John did baptize ... and preach” ([Mark 1:4](#)). Jesus continued to be on the move ([1:9](#), [12](#), [14](#)). While the other three Gospels often slow down the action, Mark moves right along with his condensed style.

[Mark 2:1–12](#), today’s text, is parallel to quite similar accounts in [Matthew 9:1–8](#) and [Luke 5:17–26](#). Although the chronological order of events varies in the three synoptic Gospels (see [Lesson Context](#) for lesson 5), all three locate this scene in Capernaum during Jesus’ initial ministry in Galilee.

According to the passage just prior, a man with leprosy had come to Jesus and pled with Him to be made “clean” ([Mark 1:40–45](#); also [Luke 5:12–15](#)). Jesus healed the man but told him not to tell others about it. Jesus may not have wanted to ignite the popular but erroneous hope that a miracle-working Messiah had come to deliver the Jews from Roman oppression. But the man “began to publish it much ... insomuch that Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, ... and they came to him from every quarter” ([Mark 1:45](#)). That shock wave continued into today’s passage.

I. A Packed House

[\(MARK 2:1–2\)](#)

A. Coming to Capernaum (v. 1)

1. And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house.

Although Jesus grew up in the small town of Nazareth in Galilee ([Matthew 2:21–23](#)), He had made *Capernaum* His base of operations when He began His public ministry in that region ([4:12–16](#)). Capernaum was a town on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus had frequent interactions there ([Matthew 4:12–13](#); [9:1–9](#); [Luke 7:1–5](#); etc.).

As news spread of Jesus' presence in Capernaum, He was likely at *the house* of Simon and his brother Andrew ([Mark 1:21, 29](#)). Simon's mother-in-law had been healed there and showed herself happy to offer Jesus hospitality ([1:30–31](#)). Many female disciples supported Jesus in His ministry through funds and hospitality (example: [Matthew 27:55–56](#)); Simon's mother-in-law was probably one of these women. Although there is no indication that she left Capernaum, her daughter —Simon Peter's wife —did (see [1 Corinthians 9:5](#)).

B. Capacity Crowd (v. 2)

2. And straightway many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and he preached the word unto them.

Partially as a consequence of a healed man's spreading the news about Jesus (see [Lesson Context](#)), *there was no room* in or even near the house where Jesus was. The house was probably a rectangular, one-story building surrounded by a large, walled courtyard.

The site where archaeologists believe Peter's house had been is about 28 feet long. Evidently the door was left open so that others could at least cram close to it and hear what was being said. Those who could do so listened to Jesus' preach *the word*—that is, the good news regarding the impending kingdom of God and the necessity of repentance and faith (see [Mark 1:14–15](#)).

STANDING ROOM ONLY?

Many years ago, a young congregation was looking for ways to raise community awareness of their small church. One of the elders, a strong willed man, was convinced that a certain tent-revival preacher could achieve this. So that man was called to do an evangelistic crusade.

The evangelist was known for the somewhat circus-like atmosphere that pervaded the services held inside his "big tent." The meeting got off to a small start, with about 90 percent of the seats empty. Undeterred, the revivalist went on local media the following day to report "capacity crowds."

Even though the meeting continued for two weeks, there were never any "standing room only" crowds. It took the church several years to recover from the embarrassment.

There was no need for false reports to get a crowd around Jesus. What happened when Jesus came to town was more spectacular than anyone imagined. But do we still tend to look to gimmicks to bring people to Christ?

—C. R. B.

II. A Paralyzed Man

([MARK 2:3–5](#))

A. Extraordinary Entrance (vv. 3–4)

3. And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

Meanwhile, *four* men carrying a fifth man approached the packed house. The only thing we know for sure about this man who was *sick of the palsy* is that he was unable to walk. He may not even have had use of his arms.

His condition could have been from birth (compare [Acts 3:2; 14:8](#)) or as the result of an accident, a stroke, etc. The determination of the man's friends to bring him to Jesus suggests that he was in dire straits, and those four believed Jesus could help.

What Do You Think?

What could you do to help your church start or expand a ministry of driving people to medical appointments when they are unable to do so themselves?

Digging Deeper

What role should [1 Timothy 5:3–16](#) play in limiting or focusing such a ministry, if any?

4. And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

The action of breaking a hole in *the roof* isn't as destructive as it seems. Houses in Israel in Jesus' day generally had a flat roof that was accessible by a ladder or stairway. The wooden crossbeams were overlaid with reeds, branches, and baked mud or clay. This thatched material had to be repacked with a stone roller every fall before the winter rains. It wouldn't have been difficult for the four men to dig through the thatch, and their deconstruction could be repaired with relative ease.

Even so, imagine the drama of the scene: people in the house below are being sprinkled with debris; they are startled and confused. Then light begins to filter in as the hole becomes bigger. Then the light is blotted out by something being lowered through the hole. Not just something — a man on a bed! Where there was no room before, certainly the crowd jostles and divides to make room for this newcomer. Likely a few step forward to help with the lowering once they realize what is happening.

What Do You Think?

If you were attending a modern-day ministry event that was as crowded as the one in the text, under what conditions would you give up your seat or ticket to someone else? Why?

Digging Deeper

Were those gathered around Jesus selfish for not making way for the disabled man and his friends in the first place? Why, or why not?

B. Surprising Statement (v. 5)

5a. When Jesus saw their faith.

The reason given for what Jesus said in response is *their faith*. The plural *their* is important since it includes the faith of the friends rather than just that of the afflicted man. Seeing the great lengths these men went to, Jesus realized that they believed He had the power to heal their friend (compare: [Matthew 9:2](#); [Luke 5:20](#)).

What Do You Think?

How can you do better at developing the kind of faith that others can see?

Digging Deeper

How do you balance [Matthew 5:14–16](#) with [6:1–4](#) in this regard?

5b. He said unto the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins be forgiven thee.

What Jesus had to say in reaction to this extraordinary entrance surprises us! Wouldn't we have expected Jesus to say something like, "Son, be healed"?

Instead, what Jesus said got at the heart of most people's assumptions about illness. The Old Testament frequently assumes a direct connection between sin and sickness. God's forgiveness is often required for physical healing, and healing is often the evidence of forgiveness (examples: [Exodus 15:26](#); [2 Chronicles 7:14](#); [Psalm 41:3–4](#); [Isaiah 19:22](#)). This belief persisted into Jesus' own day; it's what led the disciples to ask regarding a blind man, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" ([John 9:2](#)).

Back to our text at hand, the sequence of events suggests that Jesus treated the paralysis as being the result of a spiritual malady. Every issue of humanity's physical frailty can be traced in a general sense to the sin of Adam and Eve ([Genesis 2:16–17](#); [3:1–19](#)). But that doesn't mean every specific illness is traceable to a specific sin of a person (see [John 9:3](#)). Regardless of why the man was paralyzed (a discussion Jesus did not engage in with this crowd), Jesus recognized that the man's greater need was to be *forgiven* for his *sins*.

III. Cynical Bystanders

(MARK 2:6–9)

A. Silent Skepticism (vv. 6–7)

6a. But there were certain of the scribes sitting there.

The scribes were educated both in God's written law and its oral interpretation. By proportion, Mark mentions them the most frequently of the four Gospels. But only one time is one of them depicted in other than a negative light (see [Mark 12:28–34](#)). *Sitting* was often a posture of teaching, which suggests that these scribes were anticipating more of a debate with Jesus than being taught by Jesus (also [Luke 5:17](#)).

6b–7. And reasoning in their hearts, Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?

Mark does not describe the reaction of the paralyzed man, his friends, or the larger crowd to Jesus' surprising statement, but only the unspoken skepticism of the scribes. Priests could offer sacrifices for forgiveness on behalf of those who took the proper steps of repentance (example: [Leviticus 5:5–6](#)). The

scribes were well aware that the Old Testament taught that no one *can forgive sins but God only* ([Exodus 34:6–9](#); [Psalm 130:2–4](#); [Isaiah 43:25](#)).

But Jesus spoke as though He had the same power to forgive sins as God. If the scholars even considered whether Jesus could be God, they would have rejected the idea out of hand. There was no precedent for God becoming man.

The scribes were therefore left to conclude that Jesus was speaking *blasphemies*. They viewed Jesus' presumption to forgive sins as an arrogant offense to the authority and majesty of God. The Law of Moses pronounced the penalty for blasphemy to be death by stoning ([Leviticus 24:10–16](#); [Numbers 15:30–31](#)). That will indeed be attempted later ([John 10:31–33](#)), but not on this occasion.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to guard against jealousy when someone else's ministry results in attention and honor that you do not share?

Digging Deeper

In addition to [Philippians 1:15–18](#), what passages help you most to answer this?

A REFORMED CYNIC

Every Bible professor has to deal with the occasional student who “knows it all.” One such student — let's call him Jim—started the semester with a perpetual smirk on his face. His body language let his classmates know that whatever I said was already old stuff to him. If Jim disagreed with me, he would look around with that smirk.

I don't know what eventually shattered his sense of pride, but Jim changed during that semester. By the end of the school year, he had accepted a ministry position in a community where many citizens were cynical about the Christian faith. Jim seemed to know what drove their cynicism. He was able to counter that attitude, and the church began to grow.

The cynics in Jesus' audience were know-it-alls. Unlike Jim, they persisted in refusing to learn, even when the Messiah was their teacher. Who are you more like: the skeptics in the text, who never learned, or Jim, who grew in humility?

—C. R. B.

B. Perceptive Judgment (vv. 8–9)

8a. And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves.

We can be confident that Jesus' judgment here went beyond merely reading the body language of the skeptics. Scripture clearly affirms God's ability to know people's hearts ([Jeremiah 17:10](#); [Acts 1:24](#); [15:8](#); etc.).

8b–9. He said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk?

Jesus met the scribes' unspoken disapproval with questions of His own. The use of counter questions was common in rabbinic debate and employed frequently by Jesus (example: [Mark 11:27–33](#)). Here Jesus' counterquestion challenged the skeptics' belief that Jesus had offered the man something that wasn't in His power to give. And it paved the way for Jesus' upcoming declaration of physical healing.

It is *easier* to declare forgiveness than to tell a paralyzed man to *walk*, since the former can't be objectively verified and the latter has physical proof. But the declaration of forgiveness is more essential—and difficult. Most likely, Jesus was emphasizing that both declarations are impossible for human beings and easy for God.

IV. An Amazing Miracle

(MARK 2:10–12)

A. Absolute Authority (vv. 10–12a)

10–11. But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house.

In this climactic pronouncement, Jesus refers to himself as *the Son of man*. This rather mysterious title seems to have its origin in [Daniel 7:13–14](#), which states that God would bestow on this heavenly figure dominion and glory in the end times. “Son of man” was a favorite self-designation Jesus used. The phrase occurs some 80 times in the Gospels—and only on one occasion on the lips of anyone other than Jesus (see [John 12:34](#)).

The ambiguity of the title spared it from preconceived ideas in Jesus' day. Therefore, He was able to infuse it with His own definition. In the Gospels, this messianic title is connected with the nature of Jesus' person and work—who He is and what He does. In addition to having authority *to forgive sins*, the Son of man is Lord of the Sabbath ([Mark 2:28](#)), who came to give His life as a ransom ([10:45](#)) and rise from the dead ([8:31](#); [10:33–34](#)). He is the one who will one day come “in the clouds with great power and glory” ([13:26](#); see also [14:62](#)).

Jesus was able and willing to show the scribes—and everyone else—that He had *power on earth to forgive sins*. Although there is a technical distinction between power (“the ability to do something”) and authority (“the right to do something”; see [Luke 4:36](#); [9:1](#); etc.), Mark doesn't make a sharp distinction. Jesus has both! And that is the crux of this story. His ability to heal physically was tangible proof of ability to heal spiritually by forgiving sins.

After Jesus addressed the scribes in particular (and perhaps the crowd in general), He shifted focus to the paralyzed man. If the man could obey Jesus' command to *arise*, it would be evidence that Jesus was capable of miraculous healing. The man's obedience would also imply that Jesus' earlier pronouncement of forgiveness was as effective as His pronouncement of healing.

12a. And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all.

To put it simply, the man believed and obeyed. As there could be no evidence of the man's forgiveness without the healing, there could be no evidence of his faith without his obedience. *The bed* was likely rolled and carried.

B. Glorifying God (v. 12b)

12b. Insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion.

Mark speaks of people's being *amazed* several times in his Gospel to describe reaction to what Jesus said with authority and/or did as miraculous. The evidence Jesus offered affirmed that His declaration of forgiveness was legitimate. This event was startling evidence that the kingdom of God was indeed at hand ([Mark 1:15](#)).

We might think Mark's statement that *all ... glorified God* is overstated. Surely the scribes weren't included! But they too had to acknowledge the miracle, whether or not they believed that forgiveness had also been granted. For them to glorify God wouldn't necessarily mean that they thanked God for sending Jesus. The scribes, along with everyone else, simply had *never* seen events after *this fashion*.

What Do You Think?

What can your church do to help people have a sense of awe in worship? What will be your part in this effort?

Digging Deeper

What is your reaction to this statement: "Worship will be only as meaningful as we have prepared ourselves to make it"?

Conclusion

A. A Different Diagnosis

Today's lesson reminds us of the spiritual components involved in genuine and integrated health and healing. Whether Jesus diagnosed this man's paralysis as being a result of sin, the man certainly couldn't be made whole without spiritual healing.

No significant and permanent healing can occur apart from reconciliation with God. As we have seen, God alone forgives sins. And God alone is the source of healing. Jesus still has the power and authority to provide healing by bringing release from the crippling burden of sin. As God in the flesh, Jesus Christ was the incarnation of the profound statement recorded in [Exodus 15:26](#): "I am the Lord that healeth thee."

This is not always seen in physical healing of maladies in this current life on earth; but it will absolutely be seen in the resurrection bodies that grow from the seed of our present bodies ([1 Corinthians 15:42-54](#)).

This story also reminds us of how much we need our fellow brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. Although we probably won't need them to carry us on a stretcher to church or a prayer meeting, we do need to "bear ... one another's burdens" ([Galatians 6:2](#)). And there are times when we need to heed and practice the instruction of [James 5:16](#): "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

As you reflect on [Mark 2:1-12](#) and consider how it applies to your life, write a prayer that brings before the Lord your various needs. Lay out your physical, spiritual, emotional, relational, and material needs—and your questions about them. Call on the absolute authority of Jesus Christ to make you whole so that you can better glorify, honor, and serve Him.



Visual for Lesson 7. Use this visual as a backdrop for a mock debate: have half the class argue for forgiveness being easier and the other half for healing.

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we recognize that You have power and authority both to forgive sins and to heal sickness. We present to You every aspect of our lives; may we love You with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Jesus still has absolute authority and power to both forgive and heal.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with KJV Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the KJV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Place magazines and newspapers on chairs before learners arrive. Begin your session by forming small groups of three or four. Have all groups look in the publications for examples of our culture's search for physical and spiritual health. After several minutes, ask groups to share what they've found. Pose questions such as these:

1—Which search was easier?

2—Which kind of health concerns people more these days?

3—Which of the two kinds of health issues are more likely to drive people to seek unproven or unscriptural methods of cure?

Option. Ask class members to use their own memories and/or smartphones instead of surveying printed publications.

Lead into Bible study by noting that search for cures isn't new, and that an ancient account points us in the right direction in that regard.

Into the Word

Ask a volunteer to read aloud [Mark 2:1–12](#). Challenge class members to listen for key issues regarding Jesus and attitudes toward Him. Call for responses at the end of the reading; jot those responses on the board.

Introduce the next activity by saying, "Each of the characters would tell the story differently, mentioning details they most noticed and including their own opinions or biases. Reflect these in your brief retelling; feel free to use your 'sanctified imagination' to make reasonable inferences."

Divide the class into five groups or study pairs for this activity; assign each group one of the following from the story: (1) Jesus, (2) the gathered crowd, (3) the man on the mat, (4) the four men carrying the mat, and (5) the scribes. Assign group names according to the designated character(s), and ask each group to write a brief retelling of the story from the point of view of their character(s).

Allow groups six to eight minutes to create their retellings. If they don't have time to write smooth narratives, they may simply list some things their assigned character(s) might have said or done. As each group reports in the ensuing whole-class discussion, ask those not in that group to comment on the unique spin each character or set of characters puts on the story as seen by the reporting group's conclusions. Encourage discussion by asking what might be added and why.

Option. Distribute copies of the "Be Healed!" exercise on the activity page, which you can download. Assign each Scripture there to a different class member or study pair to paraphrase and then share results with the whole class.

Into Life

Tell the following true story:

A man in an adult Bible-study class decided to record and categorize the prayer requests he heard expressed over a 10-week period in the class. He himself made no prayer requests in order not to bias the outcome. When the 10-week period was over, he discovered that the prayer requests could be categorized and tallied this way:

Prayers for physical healing: 97 requests Prayers for situations (job loss, etc.): 26 requests Prayers for spiritual healing: 3 requests

Follow the story by asking, “What’s wrong with this picture?” *Teacher Tip:* Be absolutely silent after asking the question! If class members are themselves silent, resist the temptation to “say something” yourself. Let the discomfort of the silence continue for 15 seconds or so before you add thoughts of your own. Discuss as appropriate.

Wrap up by asking learners to share thoughts they’d include in a prayer of thanksgiving for God’s healing forgiveness. *Option.* Distribute copies of the “Finding Forgiveness” exercise on the activity page. Have learners work in study pairs to complete it. Allow time for whole-class sharing.

ACTIVITY PAGE

[Click here to download the free reproducible pdf page](#)

